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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 001306

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: RIFTS WITHIN THE "POUVOIR" MAKE RARE HEADLINES

REF: A. ALGIERS 1194

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 1267

[1](#)C. ALGIERS 984

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: An extremely rare public and personal exchange between a former president and a retired general has broken the omerta code usually observed by Algeria's ruling elite, exposing divisions within the "Pouvoir" that have persisted since the struggle for independence. The bitter exchange between the famously silent former President Chadli Bendjedid and the retired General Khaled Nezzar underscores that, as the generation that has ruled Algeria since 1962 enters its twilight years, its members are preoccupied less with Algeria's future and more with jockeying for the greatest possible personal roles in Algeria's official history. Those who took up arms against the French from the beginning of the war in 1954 continue to feel they have greater credibility and ownership of the political system than anyone else, particularly those who deserted from the French army and joined the struggle in the late 1950s or very early 1960s. At the core of the argument is the still-open wound of who is to blame for the 1992 cancellation of elections and the civil war that followed, as well as whether that moment represented the demise of democratic evolution or the salvation of a secular state. The political reality of Algeria today is that these divisions remain extremely relevant within the current government, as power in Algeria is likely to remain in the hands of this same group of septuagenarians until what one contact calls "biological realities" finally enable Algeria to look to the future. END SUMMARY.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

[1](#)2. (C) The November 12 revision of the constitution (ref A) devoted a disproportionate amount of ink to defining Algeria's official symbols and giving the state responsibility for the "official history" and its transmission to younger generations in schools. Former Communication Minister Abdelaziz Rahabi, who is helping Chadli write his memoirs and is also an acquaintance of Nezzar, told us on December 7 that Algeria's ruling elite can be expected to focus more and more on Algeria's history, both as a means of distracting people from what ails them and as a result of the natural phenomenon of aging. Rahabi said that Algeria has reached "the end of the beginning" in which the leaders of its revolution were now taking stock of their lives and working to have future generations look positively on them. Personal legacies, Rahabi said, have thus become

even more important with time than the code of silence and loyalty that has historically governed relationships among the members of the Pouvoir. Human rights lawyer Miloud Brahimi (brother of Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi) agreed with Rahabi, saying that the next few years were likely to bring continued political and economic stagnation and more public historical revelations, accusations and sniping from previously silent members of the ruling elite. Both Brahimi and Rahabi confirmed that Bouteflika himself was as much preoccupied with the burnishing of his personal legacy as anyone else (ref B).

#### THE DAF AND THE MAQUISARD

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13. (C) The December 4 editions of the French language dailies El Watan and Liberte featured lengthy, personal, front-page articles by General Nezzar and Chadli Bendjedid, respectively, each hurling accusations at the other. Nezzar worked closely with Chadli during the latter's presidency, but later blamed him for a policy of political accommodation that allowed the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) to emerge and ignite the civil war of the 1990s. Nezzar was one of the famous "janvieristes," a small group of generals who intervened in January 1992 to cancel the elections that had promised to sweep the FIS into power across the local and national spectrum. These generals also pressured Chadli into resigning from his 13-year presidency. Popular legend has it that the mercurial Nezzar was so enraged by Chadli's initial refusal to resign that he held the president by the throat against a wall in his office until Chadli agreed to step

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down. Nezzar's daughter told us on December 9 that her father was indeed "very emotional" about Chadli's public statements, in which he referred to Nezzar as a "French agent" and blamed the generals for derailing Algeria's march to democracy. Chadli asserted that he himself would have "set up a parliamentary system," although the full text of his remarks did not address how he would have managed the Islamist threat at the time. Brahimi told us that Chadli consulted him at the time, saying he only allowed elections in 1991 and 1992 after being mistakenly reassured by the presidential think tank, the National Institute for Global and Strategic Studies (INESG), that the FIS would carry "a maximum of 18-25 percent of the vote."

14. (C) Both Chadli and Nezzar are moudjahedine (veterans) of the 1954-1962 war for independence. Chadli took pains to point out that he was a "maquisard," a veteran who took up arms from the beginning in 1954. The maquisards take their name from the "maquis," wooded and rugged mountainous terrain (ref C) that served as the launching pad for guerrilla attacks against the French military. Nezzar, in contrast, initially was a conscript in the French army and "took the maquis" years later after deserting in the late 1950s. He is part of a group of generals that is still known as Deserters from the French Army (DAF), and tensions over which group has greater authority have helped shape alliances within the Pouvoir since independence. Nezzar's December 4 tirade in the press lambasted Chadli's mistakes and personal shortcomings in excruciating detail lost on ordinary Algerians, using an intimidating tone and demanding that "just because you took the maquis a few years earlier, you think that makes you more patriotic?" Chadli's daughter, whose child attends the same nursery school as one of our local staff, later told us that the wounds are so sensitive that when Chadli called Nezzar after the exchange in an effort to bury the hatchet, Nezzar refused to see him or even speak to him on the phone.

#### A BIOLOGICAL SYSTEM SEEKS TO CLONE ITSELF

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15. (C) In Brahimi's view, Algeria is in desperate need of generational change in leadership that will not occur until

the "biological clock" causes the moudjahed generation to die off. Even then, he said, stability remains paramount, and the proud members of the Pouvoir do have an interest in maintaining stability for the future. Rahabi agreed, saying that although these individuals lack a vision for the future, their attitude is not completely "apres nous, le deluge." Rahabi's view was that the various factions within the Pouvoir are attempting to clone themselves within the next generation, the 50- to 60-year-olds, as another means of securing their legacies relative to the other factions. Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia, born in 1952, is a perfect example of this phenomenon, having the backing of active and retired DAF generals of the security services. Brahimi lamented that Ouyahia's generation "is not the generation we need" in power, saying that power needed to pass to the "30-somethings." Otherwise, he said, Algeria is likely to see more of the same with the 50-somethings: a perpetuation of the current factions and alliances within the Pouvoir, though "perhaps a bit diluted" since this generation did not participate in the war for independence.

COMMENT: SQUABBLING WHILE ROME BURNS  
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16. (C) Forty-six years after independence Algeria's founding generation is entering its twilight years, struggling to assess the evolution of the country and assign credit and blame for its decisive historical moments. According to Brahimi, "they realize they have nothing left to contribute" but are not ready to step aside until assured of a glorious place in the history books. Outside their walls, a teeming young population is left feeling completely disconnected from the squabbling of the proud old men of the Pouvoir. According to Citibank country manager Kamel Driss, the vast majority of Algerians consider themselves "outsiders," alienated by a tribalized ruling elite with a set of priorities completely different from their own. Meanwhile, Brahimi explained that history is "too emotional and personal" an issue for the members of the Pouvoir. As a result, individual egos now trump secrecy on occasion, even

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while the clannish alliances of the 1950s remain as relevant as ever in the corridors of power.  
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